Using Controlled Vocabularies - The Basics

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Outline

- The (very) basics

- Commonly used vocabularies (U.S.) and how to search them

- Questions

Who is using controlled vocab access points?

- Do you currently use controlled vocabularies to identify people, families, organizations, places, topics, types of material, etc. in your archival description? [poll]
- If NO, in the chat please briefly type why.

Building a National Finding Aid Network (NAFAN)

- Project in the United States of America
  - September 2020 to February 2023
  - Archival description aggregator to support discovery
  - Analysis of EAD tag usage
    - 145k archival collections encoded in EAD XML
    - 12 regional aggregation services
  - EAD Data Dashboard

NAFAN's EAD Data Dashboard

- Occurrence of <controlaccess> element
  - Collection or fonds level: 85% of the collections analysed
    - Mostly subjects, followed by names (persons, organisations, and places) and types of materials
    - Far fewer names of families and occupations
    - Almost nothing on functions
  - Lower description levels: 2% of the components analysed
  - Only ~45% of access terms mentioned a controlled vocabulary as their source (~46% of names of organisations; ~83% of subjects
    - ○

What are controlled vocabularies?

- List of standardised terms
- Controlled
  - Process in place to agree on initial list
  - Process in place to propose/agree on changes
- Authorised
- Available for use

What are access points?

- Just what they sound like: ways into the collection
- But I can do a full text search!

Types of access points (<controlaccess>)

- People - <persname>, <famname>

- Organizations - <corpname>

- Places - <geogname>

- Topics - <subject>

- Works - <title>

Types of access points (<controlaccess>)

- Occupations - <occupation>

- Functions - <function>

- Type of material - <genreform>

- When in doubt, ask MARC:
  https://www.loc.gov/marc/bibliographic/bd6xx.html and
  https://www.loc.gov/ead/tglib/appendix_a.html#a3

- More on this in our second webinar session on 29 March 2023

Why use controlled vocab for access points?

- DACS / ISAD(G)
- Consistency
- Discoverability, including faceting
- Aggregators, local/regional/national (e.g. ArchiveGrid, OAC, TARO, and someday NAFAN!)
- Reuse for MARC

How many?

- It depends:

  - Size and complexity of a collection

  - Nature of your repository

  - Nature of your discovery system / downstream use of finding aids

- Rule of thumb: Will a researcher thank you, curse you, or just be confused?

But I'm not a cataloger…

- Exploit the past work of trained catalogers

- Wikipedia (yes, really!)

Commonly Used Resources

- Library of Congress Subject Headings

- Library of Congress Name Authorities

- Getty Art and Architecture Thesaurus

Library of Congress Subject Headings: Term Types

Type	From MARC Field	Examples
Genre/form	155/655	Diaries *Genre/form terms can also be taken from the [Art & Architecture Thesaurus](#)
Geographic	151/651	New York (State) United States Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.)
Topical	150/650	Cooking, American Socialism
Uniform title	130/630	New York times MLA handbook for writers of research papers

Library of Congress Subject Headings: Subdivisions

Subdivision Type	Subfield in Authority Record	Examples
Topical	|x	Politics and government Study and teaching Social aspects
Geographic	|z	New York (State) New York United States
Temporal	|y	18th century 20th century 1945-1960 To 1900
Genre/Form	|v	Exhibitions Correspondence Selections Collections

Library of Congress Name Authority Files

- Persons

- Families

- Corporate bodies

Library of Congress Linked Data Service

- Alternate site for searching LOC authority records

- Includes more LOC vocabularies

- Links to authority records outside of LOC

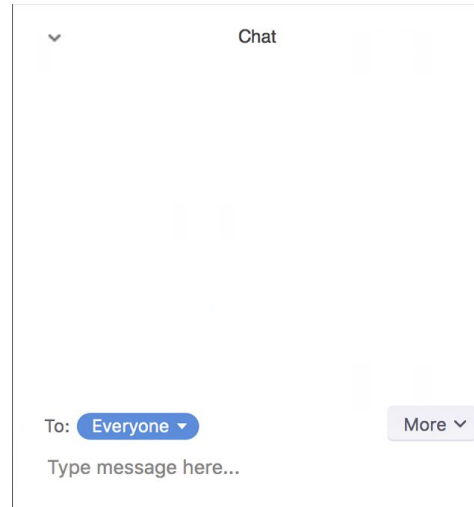- Metadata downloads

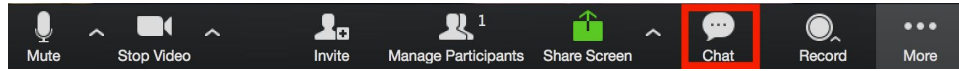# Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus

Divided into categories called facets:

- Associated Concepts
- Physical Attributes
- Styles and Periods
- Agents

- Activities
- Materials
- Objects
- Brand Names

Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus

Associated Concepts	aesthetics
Physical Attributes	deckle edges
Styles and Periods	Contemporary (style of art)
Agents	watercolorists
Activities	watercolor painting (technique)
Materials	watercolor (paint)
Objects	watercolor brushes
Brand Names	Arches paper (R) (brand name materials, Brand Names (hierarchy name))

Use **chat** for questions

Thanks!

The recording will be available on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/@SocietyofAmericanArchivists

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